

Johnston (W.) & Villeneuve (G.)

STATISTICS

—OF THE—

CORONER'S COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MONTREAL

1893.

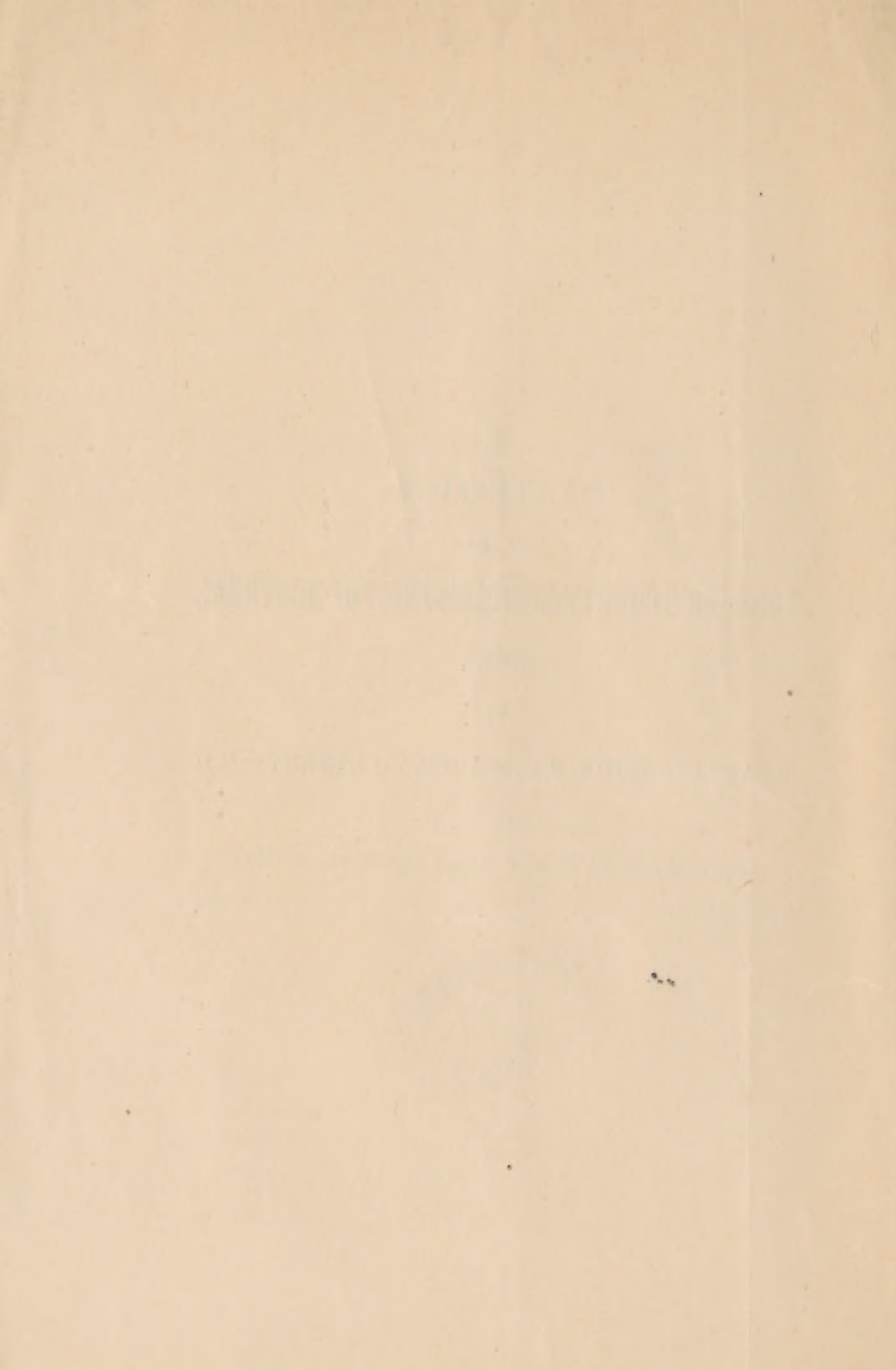
BY

WYATT JOHNSTON, M.D., AND GEO. VILLENEUVE, M.D

(Reprinted from the Montreal Medical Journal, March, 1894.)



3-4, 22



STATISTICS OF THE CORONER'S COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF MONTREAL, 1893.

By WYATT JOHNSTON, M.D., and GEORGE VILLENEUVE, M.D.,
Montreal.

The number of deaths investigated during the year was 386. Calculated from the census of 1891, the population of the judicial district of Montreal is rather more than 350,000, of which about 280,000 is urban, making a yearly rate of about 1.1 inquests per 1,000 inhabitants of the district.

In 184 of the 386 cases we were summoned to testify as experts. In the remaining 202 cases the information is obtained from the very complete public records of inquests kept by Coroner McMahon. Of these there were 36 cases in which no medical testimony was taken. In the remaining 166 cases, the medical evidence was given by other physicians, who in 60 cases had either not seen the deceased professionally during life or only at a time remote from the death. In 88 of the cases the evidence was taken before the coroner alone, without a jury.

We give the following details which seem of interest.

Of the bodies, 276 were males and 109 females. In one case, that of a newborn child, the sex is not stated.

Exclusive of the new born infants, the identity of 5 bodies remained unknown, being in each case persons found drowned.

CLASSIFICATION BY AGES.

Age...	New-born.	Under 1 yr.	1 to 5 yrs.	5 to 10 yrs.	10 to 20 yrs.	20 to 30 yrs.	30 to 40 yrs.	40 to 50 yrs.	50 to 60 yrs.	60 to 70 yrs.	70 to 80 yrs.	80 to 90 yrs.	90 to 100 yr.	Unknown.	Total.
Cases.	14	11	23	14	25	55	46	58	44	34	17	15	3	27	386
Per ct.	3.6	2.8	5.9	3.6	6.5	14.3	11.9	15.1	11.4	8.8	4.4	3.9	0.8	7.0	100.0

CLASSIFICATION BY MONTHS.

Month.....	Jan.	Feb.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total.
Cases	23	35	35	28	36	44	33	40	27	41	26	18	386
Percentage	5.9	9.1	9.1	7.2	9.3	11.4	8.5	10.4	7.1	10.6	6.7	4.7	100.0

NUMBER OF AUTOPSIES HELD, WITH THEIR PROPORTION TO THE
NUMBER OF INQUESTS IN EACH MONTH.

Month.....	Jan.	Feb.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total.
Autopsies..	3	2	1	6	4	10	5	9	5	8	2	1	56
Percentage	13·1	5·4	2·8	21·4	11·1	22·7	15·1	22·5	18·1	19·5	7·7	5·5	14·5

CLASSIFICATION BY VERDICTS AND CAUSES OF DEATH.

I.—HOMICIDES.		II.—SUICIDES.	
Firearms	1	Firearms	5
Blows and falls.....	4	Cutting throat.....	3
Criminal negligence	4	Hanging	2
Infanticide.....	3	Drowning	1
Total.....	12	Jumping from height.....	1
		Railways	2
		Poisoning	9
		Total.....	23
III.—ACCIDENTS.			
Firearms	4	Drowning	41
Machinery.....	3	Choking by food.....	3
Elevators	3	Overlaying	3
Railways	23	Illuminating gas.....	7
Street railways.....	8	Administration of chloroform	2
Horse and carriage.....	14	Poisoning	11
Tobogganing	1	Exposure	2
Burns, scalds, burning build- ings	22	Sunstroke.....	1
Explosions.....	3	Other causes.....	1
Falls from height	11	Total	174
Falling bodies.....	11		

IV.—NATURAL AND UNKNOWN CAUSES.

<i>Circulatory System</i> (40)—Heart disease.....	30
Aortic aneurism.....	1
<i>Respiratory System</i> (35)—Pneumonia.....	15
Phthisis and hæmoptysis	17
Bronchitis	1
Pulmonary embolism.....	1
Other diseases.....	1
<i>Digestive System</i> (12)—Diarrhoea.....	5
Peritonitis.....	2
Other diseases.....	5

<i>Nervous System</i> (18)—Apoplexy	10
Congestion of brain	2
Other diseases	6
<i>Genito-Urinary System</i> (5)—Chronic nephritis	1
Urethral fever	2
Puerperal fever	
<i>Developmental Diseases</i> —Stillborn	5
<i>Infectious Diseases</i> —Typhoid	1
Diphtheria	1
<i>General Diseases</i> (10)—Purpura and scurvy	2
Senile debility	4
Infantile debility	4
Other diseases	2
<i>Habits and Occupations</i> —Intemperance	5
<i>Unknown causes</i>	45
Total	177

SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL GROUPS OF CAUSES OF DEATH, GIVING
THE PERCENTAGE WHICH THEY FORM OF THE TOTAL INQUESTS
AND ALSO THEIR FREQUENCY, PER 10,000 LIVING.

Verdicts.	Number.	Per cent.	Per 10,000 living.
Homicide	12	3·11	0·34
Suicide	23	5·96	0·65
Accidents	174	45·07	4·96
Natural and unknown causes	177	45·86
Total	386	100·0

Deaths from Homicide.

A few remarks upon these different groups may not be out of place.

We have no case of conviction for murder or manslaughter to record. Of 12 verdicts of homicide, 3 were for infanticide by persons unknown. In none of these was the guilt brought home to an individual. Of the 9 remaining cases: in one the violence took place in Ontario and therefore has no bearing upon the criminality of this district; two charges, both for manslaughter, are still before the courts; one case was discharged by the police magistrate; in 5 cases the grand juries found no bill, and the only one which came before the Court of Queen's Bench was dismissed by the judge without calling for the defence. In none of the cases was there any evidence of malice.

The results of the incriminating verdicts of coroner's juries here appear to be of a surprisingly mild and harmless character. In a number of cases of accidental death, verdicts of "negligence not criminal" were found.

Deaths from Suicide.

SEX AND SOCIAL CONDITION.

MALES.		FEMALES.	
Married	12	Married	1
Unmarried	4	Unmarried	2
Not stated	2	Widows	2
	18		5
Total		23	

SUICIDE: CLASSIFICATION BY AGE.

Age	Below 20.	20 to 30.	30 to 40.	40 to 50.	50 to 60.	Above 60.	Total.
Number	1	4	4	8	4	2	23

SUICIDE: CLASSIFICATION BY MONTHS.

Month	Jan.	Feb.	March.	April.	May.	June.	July.	August.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number	0	0	2	2	4	4	1	3	1	2	2	2

The occupations of the male victims were as follows:—Lawyers, 1; farmers, 1; merchants and clerks, 4; workmen and servants, 12.

The apparent causes were as follows:—Business trouble, 1; family trouble, 1; unknown, 1; physical disease and suffering, 2; love, jealousy, or dissipation, 4; drink, 5; mental disease, 9.

It is reassuring to note that the frequency of suicide, viz., 0.65 per 10,000, in Montreal, is low in comparison with most other large American cities, the rate per 10,000 living in 1891, having been as follows: Baltimore, 0.56; Philadelphia, 0.76; Boston, 1.11; New York, 1.57; Chicago, 1.87; St. Louis,

2.16; San Francisco, 2.66. In Paris, the annual rate of suicide is about 3.78 per 10,000.

Of 9 cases where poison was the means employed, 7 were by Paris green; and one from rough-on-rats. Some means should be taken to restrict the too ready sale of such deadly commodities. The suicides by firearms, cutting throat and hanging, were all in males.

Accidental Deaths.

The commonest causes of accident, in order of frequency, were:—

Drowning.....	41, or 23.5 per cent.
Railways.....	23, or 13.2 “
Burns, scalds and fires...	22, or 12.6 “
Horses and carriages....	14, or 8.2 “
Falls from height.....	11, or 6.3 “
Falling bodies.....	11, or 6.3 “
Poisoning.....	11, or 6.3 “
Street railway.....	8, or 4.4 “
Illuminating gas.....	7, or 4.1 “

Drowning.—The number of drowning accidents is sufficiently high to attract attention. Of the 41 cases, the accidental nature of the drowning was well established in 32 cases only, all that could be stated about the remaining 9 bodies being simply that they were found in the water.

Illuminating Gas.—The number of deaths from illuminating gas is also surprisingly large. The danger of gas depends upon the proportion of carbon monoxide it contains, and this again depends upon the mode in which the gas is prepared. It has always been asserted that the gas supply of Montreal contains a very small proportion of this dangerous ingredient, but the large number of deaths from this cause would seem to render the subject worthy of investigation by our health authorities.

The accidents happening in connection with public travel naturally have a great public interest.

Fatal Railway Accidents.—The victims were trespassers in 10 cases; employees (brakemen or switchmen) in 6 cases; travellers in 4. In 4 cases the accidents occurred at level crossings.

Street Railways.—Of 8 fatal accidents during the past year, 5 occurred in connection with electric cars and 3 with horse

cars. Two of the victims were employees; 1 was a child playing upon an empty car on a siding; 3 were persons crossing the street, and 2 were passengers (one of whom got off the car, while in motion, on the wrong side and was struck by an approaching car on the other track; the other was killed while trying to pass from one car to another while in motion). None of the accidents were shown to be due to the use of the trolley system or the over head wire.

Elevators.—Three deaths which occurred from elevator accidents were all due to imprudence of the persons killed, none arising from any defect in the machinery.

In most of the accidental deaths the cause was clearly established by the evidence of eye witnesses, and the investigations were conducted chiefly with a view of deciding whether there had been criminal carelessness or not.

Deaths from Natural Causes.

In 130 cases definite natural causes were assigned, and in 47 the finding was either "natural causes," "unknown causes," or "unknown natural causes." The nature of the cause of death was almost always made out when autopsies were made out, and, therefore, the expression unknown means that, in most cases, no attempt was made to find out the cause of death. It has not seemed advisable to attach any importance to the relative frequency of the known and unknown causes shown in the tables, because, in a large number of cases, definite causes were assigned for the death without any proof at all being adduced that the alleged causes really existed.

There is no doubt that a large number of the deaths investigated during the year were, directly or indirectly, due to drink, but as the conclusions of the juries on this point appear to have been arrived at by intuition rather than by investigation and weighing of the evidence, definite statements on this head based on the verdicts would be misleading. We have, therefore, refrained from attempting to estimate the exact proportion of deaths due to intemperance.